

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 MCT-01 OMB-01 IO-13 ACDA-07 /078 W

-----126276 201102Z /10

R 200854Z JUL 77

FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2591

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

CINCPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: PINS, RP

SUBJECT: TOUR OF SOUTHERN PROVINCES

REF: (A) MANILA 11031; (B) MANILA 10985

1. SUMMARY. CHARGE AND EMBOFFS VISITED PHILIPPINE ARMED FORCES SOUTHERN COMMAND (SOUTHCOM) JULY 9-12, TOURING THE FOUR SOUTHERMOST PHILIPPINE PROVINCES, SCENES OF FIERCE FIGHTING BETWEEN THE MNLF AND PHILIPPINE ARMED FORCES PRIOR TO CURRENT CEASEFIRE. THE AREA IS PRESENTLY RELATIVELY FREE OF VIOLENCE AND THE GOP IS INFUSING RELATIVELY LARGE SUMS OF MONEY TO DEMONSTRATE ITS CONCERN FOR THE MUSLIM POPULATION. THE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS OF THE GOP ARE, HOWEVER, ESSENTIALLY LIMITED AND DO NOT ADDRESS THE FULL RANGE OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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GRIEVANCES OF THE MUSLIMS. THE NEAR TERM OUTLOOK IS FOR CONTINUED PEACE. BAYOND THAT SPECULATION IS HEAVILY CONTINGENT. END SUMMARY.

2. THE PARTY WAS ABLE TO VISIT THE FOUR SOUTHERMOST PHILIPPINE PROVINCES, ZAMBOANGA DEL SUR, SULU, BASILAN AND TAWI-TAWI, AND TO ASSESS TO SOME EXTENT THE GOP'S CURRENT

DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS AND THE VIABILITY OF THE CURRENT CEASE-FIRE. THOUGH OCCASIONAL CLASHES BETWEEN THE ARMY AND MNLF HAVE OCCURRED, THE CEASEFIRE IS PRESENTLY HOLDING. DEPUTY COMMANDER SOUTHCOM BRIG. GEN. GAURANO DESCRIBED SITUATION AS GAME IN WHICH MNLF AND ARMED FORCES COMPETE FOR SUPPORT OF POPULATION AND CONTROL OF TERRITORY. MANY OFFICERS WITH WHOM PARTY SPOKE ATTRIBUTED CONTINUATION OF CEASEFIRE TO GOVERNMENT'S DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM. THEY CLAIMED THAT GOVERNMENT'S CONCERN FOR MUSLIMS WAS PATENT AND THE MNLF SOLDIERS WERE RETURNING TO GOVERNMENT CONTROLLED AREAS BECAUSE OF THIS CONCERN.

3. IN AREAS UNDER ITS CONTROL, MNLF CONTINUES TO RECRUIT AND TRAIN NEW PERSONNEL AS WELL AS TO FUNCTION AS EFFECTIVE LOCAL GOVERNMENT--MOST NOTABLY BY COLLECTING TAXES. UNITS OF THE ARMY AND MNLF COMMUNICATE REGULARLY AND MEET TO DEAL WITH LOCAL PROBLEMS. PIRATES AND BANDITS, ENDEMIC IN SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES, POSE A SERIOUS PROBLEM FOR GOP OFFICIALS, WHO CLAIM MNLF USING BANDITRY AS COVER FOR CEASE-FIRE BREAKS. GUARANO STATED THAT MNLF/GOP AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE FOR JOINT OPERATIONS AGAINST BANDITS, BUT IMPLEMENTATION SOMETHING ELSE AGAIN. SUBSEQUENTLY GOP HAS ANNOUNCED THAT MNLF WILL PARTICIPATE IN JOINT OPERATIONS WITH PHILIPPINES ARMED FORCES (REF A).

4. MAIN THRUST OF GOP'S DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM AIMED AT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PROVIDING HOUSING AND PUBLIC WORKS FOR FOUR SOUTHERN PROVINCES. PARTY VISITED FOUR GOVERNMENT HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS, TWO OF WHICH, CONSTRUCTED BY PHILIPPINE ARMY, NOT OCCUPIED THOUGH COMPLETED FOR SEVERAL MONTHS. PROBABLY MOST SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM IS THAT OF AMCIT BISHOP PHILIP SMITH IN JOLO, WITH HOUSING FOR POOR AND "MIDDLE CLASS" RESIDENTS FULLY OCCUPIED AND LONG WAITING LISTS. PARTY GAINED ONLY SCATTERED IMPRESSIONS ON CHANGES IN PACE OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITY. ZAMBOANGA REMAINS ACTIVE, AND RUBBER AND COPRA PRODUCTION ON BASILAN APPEAR NOT DISRUPTED. ON JOLO LARGE TRACTS OF PREVIOUSLY CULTIVATED LAND, NOW IDLE, COULD BE SEEN FROM AIR. ON TAWI-TAWI PACE IS SLOW IN BEST OF TIMES.

5. COMMENT: THOUGH GOP DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS IMPOSING AT FIRST GLANCE, THEY ADDRESS ONLY PORTION OF MUSLIM GRIEVANCES. QUESTION OF LAND RIGHTS, EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES, AND PRESERVATION OF MUSLIM CULTURE APPEAR DOWN-PLAYED IN GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAM. DESPITE MULTIPLE ANOMALIES OF PROTRACTED CEASEFIRE, MILITARY AND CIVILIAN OFFICIALS SEEM TO BE TAKING NEW DEVELOPMENT EMPHASIS SERIOUSLY, BUT NOT SURPRISINGLY THEY STILL APPEAR TO LACK SENSITIVITY TO

MUSLIM POPULATION AND TO BE PROFFERING GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAMS WITH DISCERNIBLE PATERNALISM. (MANY GOP OFFICIALS CONTINUE TO REGARD ANY GENUINE FORM OF AUTONOMY AS UNACCEPTABLE.) CONTINUED CEASEFIRE IS PERHAPS LESS DUE TO ATTRACTIVENESS OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS AND MORE TO BATTLE FATIGUE ALL AROUND. AS MEMORIES OF THE HARDSHIP OF INSURGENCY RECEDE, AND SHOULD GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS REMAIN SUPERFICIAL, RESENTMENT AMONG MUSLIMS COULD ONCE AGAIN ERUPT INTO VIOLENCE. FOR THE TIME BEING, HOWEVER, PEACE MORE OR LESS REIGNS. WE DO NOT RULE OUT THAT HABITS OF PEACE AND VESTED INTERESTS IN DEVELOPMENT ON BOTH SIDES MAY EVOLVE OVER TIME AND IN CONNECTION WITH OTHER DEVELOPMENTS (FOR EXAMPLE REF B), INTO MODUS VIVENDI NO WORSE AND PERHAPS BETTER THAN WHAT OBTAINED IN DECADES IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MARTIAL LAW.

6. DETAILS ARE REPORTED IN MANILA A-176.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PROVINCE, LIBERATION FRONTS, DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS
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Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977MANILA11159
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
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Format: TEL
From: MANILA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770739/aaaabhpa.tel
Line Count: 141
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
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Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 MANILA 11031, 77 MANILA 10985
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19-Jan-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1805265
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: TOUR OF SOUTHERN PROVINCES
TAGS: PINS, EAID, RP, MNLF
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/e5210467-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009